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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH IN THE FARM AND HOME DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM*
Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities
Kellogg Center - November 15, 1955
Irma H. Gross

When I was asked to give this talk before the present audience, my first reaction was one of timidity. You see you are the highest "high brass" I have ever addressed and I was properly impressed! I was reminded of the only other similar experience when some two decades ago I was invited to talk at my own alma mater. Somehow that was also a very special occasion in my professional life.

When Glenn Johnson and I talked over our common topic together, we found that we agreed on the central core, that is, the importance of developing research on decision-making and value systems in regard to farm and home development. That interest and philosophy as expressed in his speech I will not specifically repeat, but I know you will recognize that his central ideas are mine also.

I will also not spend a great deal of time on the history of research in home management, interested as I am in that subject. Suffice it here that early research in the subject was centered on the particular resource that was managed, not on the process of management. Probably the earliest resource studied was money, followed somewhat later by research in time management and in energy management. There has also been widespread interest in research in the management of time and energy combined, generally called work simplification. Research in that topic has included work space research which has both come from, and led into housing research.

We have had, however, very little on research on the totality of home management - what occurs during management. There is some agreement that the process of management includes three steps - planning, controlling the plan in action, and evaluating its success after completion. At Michigan State University, we have been interested from the mid 1930's in understanding more of this totality of management. Our work here to some extent illustrates three stages of research. The first is the descriptive stage - finding out "what is". Our first management study done in the late '30's and early '40's was chiefly of that nature. The second stage in research has been called the "categorizing or classification" stage relating "what is" to various factors. We have done a bit of that in management and I would mention especially Dorothy Van Bortel's study on differences in home management at two socio-economic levels. The third

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stage in research is the evaluating one. Now I realize that value judgments are anathema to some researchers in the social sciences. It is difficult, however, to avoid value judgments in the long run and there are indications of value judgments in some of the earlier work done by Dorothy Dickins at Mississippi State College and by Jean Warren at Cornell. We did one small study of management entirely in the area of value judgments. It is entitled "Measuring Home Management."

Interesting as research is in either farm or home management per se, I know the immediate concern of this audience is research especially geared to the farm and home development program. Now, obviously any research that has a value to the farm or to the home is of value here, but research may also be somewhat specialized to the combined program. Again let me state my agreement with Glenn Johnson's presentation in which he emphasized decision or choice-making and value systems as being basic, both to the farm and home, separately considered and to the combined program. I would, however, mention another kind of research which is especially important to the farm and home development program, and that is research in how any group, and the family of course is a group, works together harmlessly to make joint decisions. That kind of research leads us into the area known as group dynamics. A certain amount of work has been done in it, but we need to know much more.

Incidentally, in passing I would like to comment on the newer techniques that are needed for the kinds of research which we are presenting for your consideration today. We in the Social Sciences have leaned in the past very heavily on questionnaires, interviews, and schedules, and of course rightly; but on the other hand if one is going to probe more deeply into the behavioral sciences there is no doubt but that newer techniques are needed. Now many efforts are being made, just the beginnings, of course, and they vary from the extremely mechanical kind of technique, that is an actual machine into which can be fed the various alternatives of decision-making, and then the machine will come out with the answer to a very very different, a very - well, shall I say a much more human kind, known as projective techniques. This is not the time or place to describe and probably I'm not the person to describe, what is meant by projective techniques; but suffice it - they are devices by which one gets at meanings which are not immediately apparent, perhaps even to the person who is giving information, and which in general are not tapped by direct questions - a fascinating field, that of the projective technique. We tried it a bit in the Van Bortel Study to which I have referred above.

Now, as to research completed or in progress, or at least at the point where it can be put into operation. There are in widely scattered places reports on values and goals research and decision-making research that definitely need to be pulled together lest we very much err in the way of duplicating past effort. Now these types of research have been done chiefly by the basic social sciences, philosophy, psychology, sociology. It is probably fair, however, to say that either nobody has dug out what exists or that what exists is not really sufficient for what we need to know.

We have certain fairly well agreed upon ideas about decision-making. Now some of those ideas have come through research but quite a good many of them have come, shall we say, from our past experience, from logic, from thinking through. It may seem out of place in a talk on research to call your attention to the fact that the world had gone on many many centuries before such a thing as organized research was developed and that a fair amount of valuable knowledge had been accumulated through logic and thought without specific "research." We are agreed, as I said before, on certain things in regard to decision-making. We are pretty well agreed not to call anything a decision unless it is a conscious process. If it is simply habitual action we leave it out of the field of what we call decision. For example, in the activity which we call budget-making, probably many items are put down simply from past experience, without actually deciding what the item or the amount allowed for it should be as it goes down - that, then would not be a true decision, although it would be in an activity-budgeting-that normally calls for decision making. Another kind of information about decisions which we agree on reasonably well is that a decision occurs in - well shall I say steps? I hate to use the word steps over and over again, but in a succession of events. We don't agree exactly on what the succession is, but there is a fair amount of unanimity that in making a decision one seeks alternatives, one thinks through alternatives and then eventually one selects an alternative. Incidentally, that third step is least well understood, as to how we grasp a particular alternative. Another phase or part of the sequence is accepting responsibility for putting the decision into action.

My function here is probably to acquaint you specifically with what has been done or is being done or planned in home economics research, and so I shall limit myself to home economics projects from here on - well maybe not in what's needed, but certainly in what has been done. I would call your attention to the work of certain of the experiment stations and of certain people in some of the stations. I know that I am not aware of much valuable work that is being done, and I do not mention these as the only projects carried out. I think, however, they are pretty much the only ones that have gotten into print. Of the work in process I am less sure. For example, even at this meeting I came upon information as to what Dorothy Dickins is doing at Mississippi, which obviously should come in here and I just didn't have the chance to talk with many of the experiment people here to know what pertinent research is in progress. I think it would be well to watch Ohio State, where Hillman has done an interesting project, some phases of which give information on home management and specifically on decisions and goals. I would watch Cornell for a specialized kind of research right now. They are working on the subject of the work unit, which should have a very practical bearing on farm and home development programs. In addition many of their doctoral and master's theses offer light on this subject. I would especially watch Ruth Honey's work at Pennsylvania State University, both what is in print now and what is coming out and is in progress. She and her fellow workers are interested in the factors which bear on family financial decisions and the effects of these decisions on family relations, as well as the occurring satisfactions or

dissatisfactions. Watch what Dorothy Dickins is doing at Mississippi State College, whose project I mentioned just a few moments ago. I think you would like to know of two doctoral theses definitely in the area of decision making: One by Esther Everett, working under Margaret Liston at Iowa State College. Because she is located on our staff she is using a part of the Michigan sample of the farm management cooperative project directed at this end by Glenn Johnson. She is investigating the woman's part in certain decisions as made in the farm and home development program. Another doctoral thesis, not being done in home management but very closely allied, is that of Beatrice Paolucci in home economics education here at Michigan State. She is investigating decision-making in home economics classes. Another development to watch is a joint, or rather a cooperative project of the North Central Experiment Station Region on farm family financial security. In order to develop that program there will need to be preliminary work done on decision-making, among other aspects.

Now as to research needed. Although Glenn and I tried hard to avoid duplication in our presentation, when it comes to this next point which I shall talk about with you, we agreed that it was so important that probably both of us should bring it to the attention of our audience. It is the relative importance of basic research to underpin the farm and home development program, as compared with applied research. I know, of course, how difficult it is to persuade practical people of the need of basic research when many immediate problems are calling out for solution. But I believe in developing anything as important as this program, and really as new as it is, because while it is based on older programs, while it has elements of likeness to older programs, still it is something new in the world and in order to launch it - I don't mean to launch it, but to promote it properly, there must be basic research. If we are satisfied with attacking small and specific problems, the ideas, the underlying ideas which are important, will not develop properly or perhaps at all, and if we stay too long on applied research we will find that the fountainhead from which it must come has dried up for lack of attention.

It is not difficult to pick out examples of basic research needed. I will mention only three; the first of which I really have been spending some time on already though I haven't labeled it till this moment as basic research. Both of your speakers today have emphasized the need of deepening our understanding of decision-making, but I would still like to bring it in as one of three examples of basic research needed. A second was touched upon and to some extent developed by the preceding speaker and that is the importance of knowing more about the relative satisfactions coming from different choices. In more technical language, our value systems. Before I prepared this talk I visited a bit with Margaret Browne of our own staff, who has been active in the farm and home development program here, to see if she could give me some suggestions of needed research. One of the things that she spoke of, although she did not use the technical term basic research, was this thing of needing to know where our satisfactions - our long-time satisfactions - come from. She was not afraid of the intangibles of life as being important to this program.

The third example of basic research needed is one which has not yet even been mentioned and that is, the need for greater understanding of what I spoke of earlier as the second step in home management - really in any management. If you remember, we said that any managerial process consisted first of planning, second, controlling the plan in action and third, evaluating. Now if you talk with lay people, or even professional people, about this second step, at first they think they really know all there is to know about it - well you just make a plan, you carry it out. But truly, if one is introspective at all, you recognize that we know very very little about how a plan is carried out - I mean the mental activity that accompanies the carrying out. Now we realize that to some extent carrying out a plan involves constant quick small decisions; decision as to whether the plan is developing and also as to whether changes are needed. But one aspect of carrying out, I think, has been no man's territory up to the present time and that is, to use the term of my friend, Paulena Nickell "energizing" as being a part of carrying out of a plan. We know practically nothing about what makes some people get up and get started and keep going to the end; or what is lacking in getting up and getting started in other people, but will keep them going after they are once started; or what enables some people to get going but doesn't keep them going; or what keeps some people from doing either. Some of this material which has been considered just common knowledge or common sense, when you really look at it, scrutinize it, you realize that a tremendous amount of genuine information is needed before we can in any way really stimulate the mental activity back of carrying out a plan.

Although basic research seems to some of us the thing to promote and push, there is no reason at all why applied research cannot go along with it. I will give you just one example of a piece of applied research that Margaret Browne suggested in our conference about this talk. She said it would be very helpful if there could be genuine knowledge as to whether the resources used in producing food for home consumption on a farm, might or might not be better used for a cash crop - she referred specifically to the amount of land that would be used, the time, the energy and the money of the family members. I might give further examples, but this one probably will suggest to those of you in the audience many other immediate problems that can be attacked with profit.

Before I close, I should like to say a word or two about the importance, not only of this research, but of the whole farm and home development program, with due regard to the fact that it cannot develop properly unless we have basic research information to help in its development. It is quite important in this day and age, I believe, for a woman to feel her status in the family group. Because of the intertwining of the farm and home business, the farm woman has an especially advantageous opportunity to grasp her importance in the family group. Her recognition and the recognition by other members of the family of her status, contributes to family stability and may be one of the reasons why the farm family is more stable today than the urban family. Her sharing in this program is a means of recognizing openly her status in the family.

To the man the program unquestionably has very many practical advantages, but in addition it helps him to see the whole picture of family living. The research program should certainly bring many new ideas and emphasize the ones we hold now as to the total picture of family living on the farm.

To the older children, insofar as they share in the farm and home development program, there comes to them a preparation for their later life far beyond what the average urban young person can normally receive. There is no doubt that decision-making has always been important, planning has been important, but today even more than ever, with our changing conditions, it is important not only to help in making decisions but to become aware of how those decisions are made - That preparation for later life young farm people can attain if and as we learn more about this farm and home development program.

In closing, I would call attention to the value of this program, and hence highlight the importance of the research underpinning it, to the family as a whole. It can lead a family to recognize its own values and goals and clarify the part of the various family members in the setting of goals. It may offer guides in setting the relative weight to be placed on various claims to family resources in order to satisfy the family's dominant values and reach its goals - In short it should and probably will strengthen farm family life.





